

Chapter Thirteen

End Of The Trail - Aftermath

After Ab was imprisoned for what his family believed was clearly a case of self defense, Joseph devoted much of his time raising money for legal appeals, and left most of the responsibility of running his farm and livestock to his sons, many now grown to manhood and married. John H. was almost a father to the younger children, while Dave took care of the mail contract and still took care of his own farm and the ranches at Red Creek and at Box Canyon on the Strawberry River. Al spent most of his time on the reservation or at his trading posts on the Duschene and at White Rocks. Filt, Parley and Will had their own farms and were involved in several business ventures. Jim was becoming prominent as a leading cattleman while Stan had a large ranch at Big Piney, Wyoming. Ed and Frank worked with Pick at White Rocks.

Benny Norris, who had walked all the way to Utah, barefoot and with an Indian arrow in his shoulder was fast becoming eccentric. He had lived with both Nymphus and Joseph, but was a problem to both. Nymphus would say, "Poor Benny doesn't have all his shingles, so I must help him when I can."⁽¹⁾ Benny never married and as he became older he became convinced that he was a "herb doctor". He opened an office in a small building at the west end of Main Street where

he hung out his sign, Dr. Benj. Norris, Herb Doctor. He became quite a pathetic figure around Heber, but people humored him and needless to say, he made little money from his business.

Several of the Murdock boys still cut saw logs during the winter to float them to the valley during spring run off. A saw mill and mill pond had been built by the Provo River. On July 23rd, 1894, Calvin, a fine, good looking son of Joseph and Eliza and a favorite of all his brothers and sisters stepped into deep water at the mill pond and drowned. John H. was near at hand and tried to reach him, but could not. Calvin was 32 years old. His death was closely followed by that of Esther Melissa, only three years younger than Calvin. She died on March 14th, 1895. It seemed that beginning with Ab's downfall, troubles began to plague Joseph.

Another insight into the noble character that was Ab Murdock's as well as further proof that he was a loving, compassionate person is revealed in a letter written from prison in August, 1896 to his sister, Margaret Murray upon the death of her 3 year old son, Quince. Ab wrote of how he was saddened at the news and then enclosed the following poem.

"Mourn not for dear little Quince,
Nor to despair be driven,
Your child is saved through Jesus Christ
He now has gone to Heaven.

Tis true the trial was hard
That took him from your breast,
But proud his name, your bosom swell
For he has gone to rest.

While lying suffering on your knee,
Your heart was like to break,

And oft you sighed and wept and said
O, could my child but speak.
But still you mourn his absence now
And think you are bereaved,
Sister hark!, Thy God is good
Sister, your child is saved.
Shed not for him the bitter tear
Nor yield to sad regret,
Tis but the casket that lies there
Sister, thy child is living yet! ⁽²⁾

At about that same time Joseph took in a most distinguished guest. Professor Nathaniel Baldwin had been on the staff of Brigham Young University, but he came to the quiet of Heber Valley to research what was then considered to be only a crazy dream. He had an idea that he could transmit voices through the air by something called radio waves. It wasn't long until people around Heber Valley began calling him "Crazy Nate". John H. got Baldwin a job as a compressor operator at the Steamboat Mine in Snake Creek Canyon where he had plenty of quiet and time to conduct his experiments.

One day Baldwin asked John H. to find him an old phonograph so that he could make a sound that could be heard all around the world. John H. took him a broken phonograph and Baldwin asked him if he could raise \$500 to help him, but it was taking every cent the Murdocks had to continue legal appeals for Ab, and besides, John H. asked, what good was a sound that could be heard all around the world?

Baldwin continued his experiments and a few years later demonstrated his new invention by sending recorded music from Salt Lake City to Provo. Today all radio and television sets have speakers based on patents issued to Nathaniel "Crazy Nate" Baldwin. George Olson of Heber City later recalled that he could have purchased stock in Baldwin's company for very little, but didn't do so. Later the same stock he had been offered was valued at \$600,000! ⁽³⁾

On April 14th, 1898 Joseph's wife Eliza died at Heber City at the age of 68. It was Eliza who had sold eggs at Joseph Smith's home at Nauvoo for 3¢ a dozen, and later had borne Joseph's first child. She had suffered the countless hard times of pioneer life in adobe cabins and slab shacks hardly secure enough to keep the wolves out. Her loss was difficult for Joseph, being his third wife to die. At her death Joseph told several of his grand-daughters, "Girls, I wish you would grow up to be like your grand-mother." ⁽⁴⁾ There could be no more fitting tribute to Eliza than that simple statement. Now only his wives Jane and Elizabeth remained, and both would outlive him by a very long time, for Joseph's time was now short.

It seemed that Joseph's long fight to free Ab from prison was about to bear fruit. He had spent every cent he could raise and had worked tirelessly for seven years. Finally his attorneys assured him that Ab would soon be free. Governor Spry had agreed to sign a pardon and it would be only a few more weeks until Ab would be home. It was January and one of the coldest winters that Joseph could remember. Although it was bitterly cold, he worked hard getting



Descendents of Joseph Matheny: Jackie Pow; James Matheny, Andrew Matheny, Moroni Alva (Al), William Matheny, David Mathaniel, John Heber, Franklin Juisen, Franklin Juisen, Alvin Alvin, Richard Ellen, Chesterette Ellen, Sara Jane, Anna Matheny.

everything ready for Ab's homecoming. It kept him busy chopping wood and doing other chores, for he still had two homes to take care of. Friends noticed that he seemed to have aged, and he often complained of being cold. He finally took to bed when the family doctor told him that he had pneumonia. Joseph Stacy Murdock died of pneumonia on February 14th, 1899 at age 76.

The Wasatch Wave reported his passing as follows. "In the death of Joseph Stacy Murdock, the people of this valley will miss from among them a well known figure and an old and respected resident, for the church an ardent and devoted worker, and his family a kind and affectionate husband and father. He was one of the first settlers of this valley. He came here when Heber consisted of a dry, barren sage brush desert, with a few mud-roofed huts constituting the only habitation of man in the Valley of the Timpanogos."⁽⁵⁾

Joseph Murdock had led a long and eventful life, always on the ragged edge of the Mormon frontier. He and Joseph Smith were raised only a few miles apart at New York State where he was one of the earliest converts to the church. He later suffered abuse and scorn with the Prophet at Nauvoo. He lived through the hard times at Winter Quarters and came west with the first pioneer band in 1847. He was Brigham Young's strong right arm, working for him at Church Pastures and pioneering Davis County, White's Fort and American Fork. He served on a special mission to the Green River. He gave up all he owned to settle the Carson Mission and then abandoned everything again to fight Johnston's Army at Echo Canyon. The Utah War left him as destitute as the day he had entered the Great Salt Lake Valley,

but he never hesitated when he was called to go into the wilderness again to preside over the Provo Valley Mission at Heber City. And even as an old man, his faith never waivered when Brigham Young called him to go to the Muddy, the church's own special purgatory. Joseph Murdock spent his entire life in the service of his church and its prophets.

He had been ordained a High Priest at Nauvoo under the hand of Joseph Smith and had received his Patriarchal Blessing under the hand of Hyrum Smith. He was set apart as Bishop by Brigham Young and later was ordained as President of the High Council and Patriarch of the Church at Heber Valley. He was married five times, four times by Brigham Young. He left a mighty posterity of 32 children, 137 grand-children and 6 great-grand-children as had been promised by Hyrum Smith's Patriarchal Blessing. He was a peacemaker to the Indians at both the Carson Valley and Muddy Missions, and late in life made a treaty with Chief Tabby ending the Black Hawk War in northern Utah, bringing Hyrum Smith's prophecy to complete fulfillment.

Joseph Murdock numbered among his friends such noted men as Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Daniel Wells, Porter Rockwell, John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, Wilford Woodruff, Chief Tabby and countless other greats of Pioneer Utah. It is a credit to his honor that he was loved and respected by all of them.

So respected was Joseph Murdock that on the day of his funeral Bishop Abraham Hatch issued a proclamation in the Wasatch Wave. "To the High Council, the Bishops and Counsellors and the High Priests of this Stake Of Zion: Dear Brethren: whereas our beloved brother,

Letter written by Ab Murdock from the Utah
Territorial Prison, February, 1892
Author

president Joseph S. Murdock has departed this life, his funeral will be held at the Stake House on Saturday the 18th Inst. at 10 o'clock AM. A general attendance by all the brethren and sisters of the Stake is requested at the funeral service. Very Kindly,
Your Brother, Abraham Hatch."⁽⁶⁾

Joseph Murdock had lived his life to the fullest and had served his family, friends and church well. He was not afraid of death, knowing he would soon be reunited with the prophet and all those who had gone on before. At a request made before he died, the Heber City Brass Band played Dixie, his favorite song, and he was laid to rest under the pines overlooking the valley he had loved so well.

It was only a few weeks after Joseph's death that Ab was released from prison and returned to Heber Valley. He herded cattle at a cooperative herd owned by Al, Parley and Jim at Pine Valley on the upper Provo River. He was still handsome and those who worked with him recall that he seemed to be happy and sang a lot. Ruby Murdock, William Henry's daughter recalled that Ab was one of the handsomest men around, and a favorite of all the women at dances. He always brought the children candy and frequently left a quarter of beef at their home. Ruby said the beef was probably stolen from Al's herd, and that Ab would wink and say he was stealing from the rich to give to the poor!⁽⁷⁾

But prison life had changed him and he often became morose and wanted to be alone, and sometimes characters from prison days would be seen riding with him. Al Broadhead herded cattle on the West Fork of the Duschene and said that Ab would often stop to visit with

him but wouldn't stay long even though nightfall was near. He recalled that Ab always traveled light without either food or blanket and would make a lone camp somewhere along the trail.⁽⁸⁾

In 1905 a large part of what had been a tradition of the Murdock life fell apart when the Ute Indian Reservation was opened to homesteading. Fortunately Chief Tabby did not live to see settlers rushing in to claim his people's land, for he died at White Rocks on November 22nd, 1903. He was said to be 105 years old! Land that Al and Dave had leased was now claimed by others, became part of the national forest system or was allotted to Indian families. A new town called Theodore, now Duschene was built in a day around the trading post Al had build years before. Al put up a large tent store to meet the needs of the new settlers, but he had no license to trade and agents appointed by politicians at Washington soon granted licenses to others. Later Al did built a new wooden store building and became the town's leading businessman.

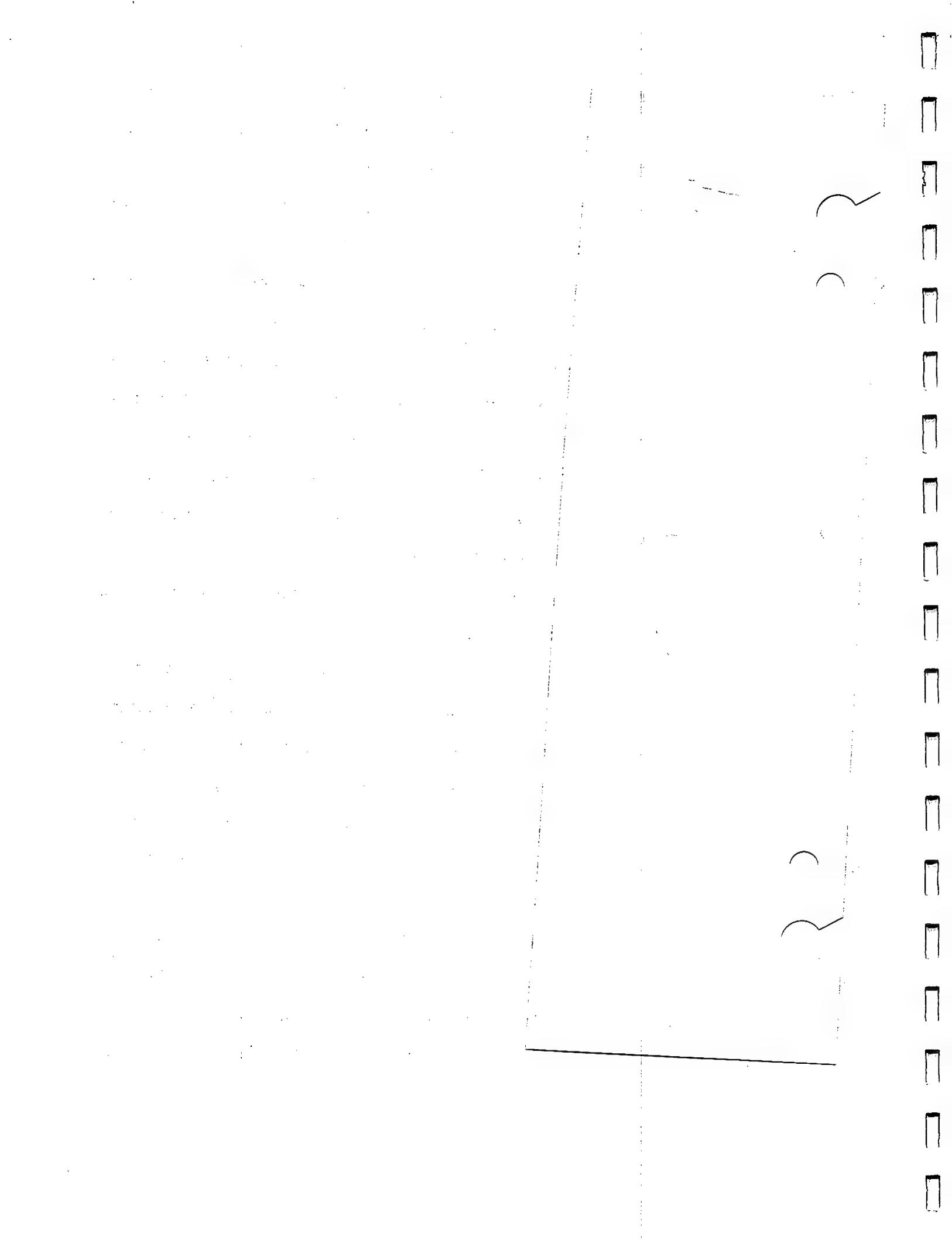
Dave had no legal claim to his large Red Creek ranch, but he did homestead a small section at Box Canyon. Water rights at Strawberry Valley were granted to farmers at Utah Valley while the land became part of the Uinta Forest. Only a few years later, land where Al and Dave had grazed livestock was flooded by the Strawberry Reservoir. Al was appointed as the first Bishop at Duschene, but Dave and his other brothers moved back to Heber City.

John H. was called on a second mission in 1907, to the Southern States. On his return he purchased the Heber Confectionary and later served as City Marshal for four years. Andrew owned a large

herd of sheep for many years and later in life owned and operated the Ideal Theatre on Main Street. Frank and Pick continued to run the store and butcher shop at White Rocks until 1925 when Frank left the reservation. Pick died in 1928 and was buried in an unmarked grave on the Johnny Harms allotment. A lot of history was buried with him, including the secret of the Lost Rhoades Mine. The opening of the reservation marked the end of an era for the Murdochs.

Joseph's wife Jane lived until she was 86 years of age while Elizabeth lived to be 96. All of the Murdochs were known for their longevity, Will lived to be 81, Frank 82, John H. and Al both 87, Parley 93 and Dave 96. Many of Joseph's daughters lived nearly as long, Margaret living to age 79 and Jane to age 92. Although Dave lived to be 96, he was active to the last. At an age when most men would take it a little easy, Dave went into the mountains where he cut his own logs to build the biggest barn in the valley. He would ride his horse to town each day, ramrod straight, although he had trouble holding the reins, for all of his fingers had been broken while playing with the cities hardball team, and he had let them heal without setting the broken bones. When he was 87 years old, Dr. Dannenberg told him he would have to stop riding horses, so Dave bought a bicycle! He was planning to learn to fly when he died at age 96.

Dave was a little irreverent, and like Nymphus he sometimes had an "eye-opener" in the morning. Many stories are told about Dave, but a family favorite is about one particularly hard winter when nearly everyone was out of hay for their livestock. One day





Albert Alma (Ab) Murdock
Son of Joseph & Pernetta Murdock, murdered
in 1911 (Author)

Dave's poor old mother told him she needed some hay, so Dave agreed to bring her a wagon load. A few days later "Grandma Jane" told him that the hay was moldy and that her cows wouldn't eat it. "Heck, I know that, Dave said, My cows wouldn't eat it either!"

On June 23rd, 1911 Ab was murdered by Alvin Scruggs near Dave's Red Creek Ranch. Scruggs claimed that Ab had stolen a horse from him in Wyoming. Scruggs said that he lay in wait at Red Creek until Ab and Scott, Dave's son then only a boy, rode down a dugway to the river. Scruggs claimed that Ab reached for a gun, so he had to kill him. In court Scott later testified that Ab was unarmed and Alphonso, who arrived on scene shortly after the murder also testified that Ab did not have a weapon. Scruggs was arrested on a complaint signed by John H., but he was released on \$1,000 bond. In court Deputy Sheriff Gundmundson related that he had issued Scruggs a deputy's badge when he passed through Heber, therefore Judge Clegg ruled that there was no cause for action against Scruggs and released him.

Al Scruggs had killed five men in Wyoming before he killed Ab, but although John H. and his brothers all knew the trial was only a farce, they realized that because of the court's feelings about Ab's previous conviction at Manti and because he was "only an Indian" they could never get a conviction against Scruggs. The Salt Lake Tribune pretty well described how hopeless their case would be if appealed to a higher court. A Tribune editorial said, "Scruggs had the drop on the half-breed, and with one rifle shot Murdock was on his way to the happy hunting ground!"⁽⁹⁾ It was the end of the trail for Ab.

In 1908 Nymphus moved from his Charleston home to Heber City

with his first wife Sarah, having given his second wife Esther a church approved divorce. Nymphus installed one of the then new-fangled telephones in his Heber home, but Sarah wouldn't use it because she said it was like talking to the dead! Nymphus had always been a poor man's philosopher, and some of his sayings are worth repeating. He said, "I'd rather be a big toad in a little pond than be a little toad in a big pond, that's why I moved from Salt Lake City to Charleston." He didn't think it was possible to get much work from a boy if more than one was hired, saying, "One boy is a boy, two boys equal half a boy and three boys are the same as no boy at all!" Another philosophy he shared was, "A poor man has but one dog, while a poverty stricken man has two dogs and a beggar has all the dogs he can get. You can always tell how poor a man is by the number of dogs he has!"(10)

His wife Sarah died in 1909 and after being married to two wives for most of his life, Nymphus was lonely, so in 1913 when he was 80 years old he married Elizibeth Green, who was then 75. After the ceremony he announced to his family and friends that he and Elizibeth had decided not to have any children! Four years later, on April 19th, 1917 Nymphus died at home. His last dying act was to give his son Joseph a Patriarchal Blessing. He had been a pioneer from the same mold as Joseph Murdock. He had been a pioneer, legislator, sheriff, militaman and Black Hawk War veteran as well as a prominent businessman. When he died he left an estate of \$40,000, a fortune at that time. One of his own sayings described him best, and was a fitting eulogy. "When I die I will have ten years of work planned!"(11)

with neither Joseph or Nymphus to care for him, poor Benny Norris became even more of a burden for Jane and Elizabeth. In his old age he had to be cared for constantly. He lived to be 81 years old, dying on October 13th, 1921. He was the last tie with the Murdock's New York State home.

The life of Joseph Stacy Murdock was a life of adventure, and the times in which he lived spanned an era from the first western settlement to the dawn of the twentieth century, from Indian villages to modern cities, from ox teams to gas buggies. Although he lived and talked with the Prophet Joseph, his last child died as recently as 1966. Joseph Murdock and all of his immediate family are gone now, but his heritage still lives on, forever remembered on the rolls of the Utah pioneers, and in names as solid and everlasting as Murdock Mountain. His memory will last as long as the mountain lasts.

Footnotes - Chapter 13

1. Men Of The Rockies, Pg 48, Hanks, 1944
2. Letter of Alma (Ab) Murdock, Utah Territorial Prison, dated August, 1896
3. Interview with George Olson, February 4th, 1972, Heber City, Utah
4. How Beautiful Upon The Mountains, Pg 436, DUP, 1963
5. Wasatch Wave, February 17th, 1899
6. Ibid
7. Interview with Ruby Murdock Gott, February 4th, 1972
8. Interview with Al Broadhead, February 17th, 1972, Heber City, Utah
9. Salt Lake Tribune, June 26th, 1911
10. Men Of The Rockies, Pg 58, Hanks, 1944
11. Ibid, Pg 57